

Qube Qualifications and Development Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates 27–30 June 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Managers and all staff have high expectations of their learners.
- The vast majority of learners successfully complete their learning programmes and improve the level of their qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Managers support partner subcontractors very well to help ensure that learners achieve. Partners benefit from the frequent opportunities to share and develop good practice.
- Learners develop their English and mathematics skills very well as learning development consultants integrate well-planned activities into learning sessions.
- Managers and learning development consultants work very well with a wide range of employers to ensure that learners benefit from good-quality workplace training tailored to their needs.
- Learners rapidly develop very high levels of maturity, confidence and vocational skills because of high-quality practical teaching.
- Learners with significant barriers to learning are supported very well to progress in employment or gain higher-level qualifications.
- Managers and staff share good practice well and develop high-quality learning resources which enhance and enliven training sessions.

It is not yet an outstanding provider because

- Training staff do not receive sufficiently detailed feedback from the observations conducted by internal quality assurers of teaching, learning and assessment to enable them to improve further the learning experience for the learner.
- Managers do not specifically identify learners who are most vulnerable to ensure that these learners receive appropriate support at the start of their learning.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Qube Qualifications and Development Ltd, operating as Qube Learning (Qube), is a privately owned training provider. The main administration centre is in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. The operations director is responsible for the management of the training provision and reports through the senior management team to the chief executive and the executive team.
- Qube is a national training provider primarily delivering apprenticeships to around 3,500 learners each year, across at least eight different subject areas, the largest of which are business administration and health and social care. It also delivers pre-employment training for adults and traineeships in conjunction with a network of partners and employers. Most learners are employed adults and most learning takes place in the workplace. A team of around 90 staff have direct contact with learners in the workplace.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of observations of teaching, learning and assessment by focusing on what learners learn and the progress they make, and providing effective feedback to help training staff improve their practice.
- Ensure that initial assessments for learners utilise all sources of information about each learner to establish the most appropriate support and style of learning, particularly for the most vulnerable.
- Capture and make use of a broader range of learner data, such as identifying learners who received free school meals or those who have been in care to ensure that these more vulnerable groups of learners receive the most appropriate support and succeed as well as other learners.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The board, managers and training staff are ambitious for their learners. They work very effectively with partner subcontractors and employers to provide high-quality apprenticeships, traineeships and pre-employment training. Staff have maintained the good quality of provision noted at the last inspection and improved outcomes for learners, which are now good.
- The chief executive officer and the senior team work energetically with employers to promote apprenticeships that address the specific skills gaps identified by local enterprise partnerships. These include apprenticeships in equestrianism, retail and health work. Successful traineeship programmes are run in conjunction with national employers in automotive retail, while specific skills gaps were identified and filled in fork-lift operations in eastern England.
- Managers' strategies to improve the teaching and learning of mathematics and English have been effective in improving the number of learners achieving qualifications in these subjects. Staff are well trained and use the detailed training notes and resources provided very effectively to ensure that most learners pass their functional skills qualifications at the first attempt. Managers and directors rigorously monitor the performance of the small number of partner subcontractors, and support them well to improve learning and to understand the expectations of functional skills and the 'Prevent' duty. Purposeful training and frequent updates ensure that staff and partners are equipped to meet learners' and employer's needs.
- Communications with the dispersed staff and partner organisations are very good. Managers make effective use of company-wide conferences and the internet to update staff and partners on emerging themes and the company's priorities, and to share resources and to provide effective training for staff. Managers use feedback from staff well to inform their decisions.
- Performance management of staff is rigorous and supportive. Underperforming staff are supported well to improve. Observation reports of teaching, learning and assessment focus too much on the activity of the learning development coordinators, with too little attention given to what learners can do or the progress they make.
- Managers and staff quickly identify learners making slow progress or at risk of not completing their programme. Staff implement effective actions to help these learners to remain on the programme or catch up quickly.
- Staff and subcontractor partners promote equality and diversity well and demonstrate a clear understanding of British values in most training sessions. Directors interrogate learner data well to identify and monitor the achievement of different groups of learners. However, this analysis does not include the relative achievement of learners previously on free school meals or those previously in care.
- Managers' actions to improve the quality of the provision are precise and monitored frequently. Managers effectively identified the critical strengths and areas for improvement in the quality improvement plan and created a candid self-assessment. However, managers do not use data with sufficient precision to identify effectively where further improvements are needed.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The senior management team provides good timely information to the executive board and the chief executive, enabling them to play a central role in the strategic direction of Qube. For example, this helped identify the need for fork-lift pre-employment training in eastern England and led to the establishment of traineeships with specific employers.
 - Since the last inspection, the board has held managers to account for the performance and outcomes of learners and staff well. Effective action has been taken to deal with underperforming staff and subcontractors. The board demonstrates a purposeful commitment to celebrating the achievement of learners, and ensuring that resources are focused on helping learners achieve.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Arrangements to ensure the safe recruitment of staff, including appropriate pre-employment checks, are rigorous. Staff receive regular safeguarding updates, which includes training on the 'Prevent' duty. Most staff have a clear understanding of how to keep learners safe, and are able to identify and report learners at risk.
 - Learners are safe and understand how to stay safe in their working practices and when using the internet.

- New staff and learners all receive a thorough induction. Staff and learners know how to deal with concerns over safeguarding, bullying and harassment, and staying safe from radicalisation and extremism. Managers respond quickly and effectively to any concerns and involve external agencies when necessary. They keep accurate and detailed records of all concerns and actions taken.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Staff are well qualified and experienced. They use their expertise well to plan effective learning sessions which are relevant to learners' individual learning goals. Learning development coordinators and specialist staff support learners very well to help improve their English and mathematics skills. Learners enjoy their learning. They work hard and make good progress.
- Learners participate in good practical learning activities which are interesting and develop their confidence in learning. Staff use questioning well to develop learners' knowledge and to check their understanding. Good learning resources and very effective use of technology enhance learning and skills development. Apprentices benefit from good contextualised examples of skills and their application. For example, several learners developed good skills in effectively handling complaints and inappropriate behaviour.
- Staff accurately identify apprentices' starting points in English and mathematics and use this information well to allocate specialist individual support. However, staff do not take sufficient account of learners' prior learning in other subjects, for example learning from previous training or work, in planning individual learning.
- Apprentices benefit from excellent specialist support to develop and enhance their English and mathematics skills alongside their vocational training. In English, attention to the development of learners' spelling and punctuation is good, supported by helpful feedback from staff on learners' marked work. Learners for whom English is an additional language benefit from individual specialist support to meet their specific needs.
- Learning development coordinators skilfully weave mathematical tasks and exercises into training. Learners quickly appreciate how mathematics relates to their everyday lives. For example, a learner who was thinking of buying a car was given work on budgeting, financial proportions, ratios and percentages to work out the purchase and running costs compared with other forms of transport. Others use calculators, produce charts and graphs, and measure medicines accurately.
- Learning development consultants build learners' skills well to enable them to utilise their learning in the workplace. For example, an apprentice team-leader now reflects on her work at a deeper level and has improved her skills in managing new staff, while a senior care assistant now understands how to manage complaints from staff, residents and their families much more effectively.
- Apprentices and employers greatly value the good communications and flexible approach of Qube staff, who provide training and assessment to fit around learners' work patterns. However, for apprentices, staff do not promote independent learning well enough, or encourage learners to take full responsibility for their own learning.
- On the programmes for unemployed adults, such as training in fork-lift truck driving, learners receive well-planned, challenging and fast-paced training, developing their skills to operate machinery at the pace required in the workplace. Learners on traineeships benefit from intensive training provided by experienced and supportive staff who work closely alongside carefully selected employers. Trainees are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning by planning work activities to maximise their learning. Both adult learners and trainees gain new skills and self-confidence, helping many to progress into sustainable employment.
- Assessment practice is good. Learners receive effective feedback, which helps them improve their work further. For example, in addition to correcting spelling and punctuation on assessed work, one learner was given help to make best use of shortcut keys when word-processing documents.
- Progress reviews for apprentices are regular and helpful. In a small minority of cases, clear targets for progression are not set and this hinders learners' progress.
- Relationships with employers are very good and feedback from employers is overwhelmingly positive. Qube staff work well with employers providing helpful feedback on the progress of their apprentices. Employers identify the positive and increased contribution of apprentices in the workplace. They support apprentices very well, working with Qube staff to select the most appropriate learning programme and to ensure that learners make good progress.

- Staff promote British values well and explain the relevance and importance of democracy and the freedom of speech in vocational settings. For example, in a childcare setting, assessors relate how the child's voice links to opinion and is heard in the choices they make over which books to read or which food they want to eat for lunch. Apprenticeship learners develop a greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities as an employee, and complete tasks to reinforce their understanding.
- Staff and learners demonstrate high levels of mutual respect. Apprentices and employers value the highly inclusive approach of Qube staff who help learners to appreciate equality and diversity during most training sessions. However, the bolstering of apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity at progress reviews is often perfunctory, particularly for learners working at higher levels.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- All learners develop self-confidence as they progress with their qualifications. Learners on pre-employment training are prepared very well for new employment opportunities, while learners on traineeship programmes are introduced to the rigours of the work environment. Apprentices work confidently with experienced colleagues bringing innovation and diversity to the workplace as they improve their knowledge and communication skills.
- Learners and apprentices are rightly proud of their achievements and the work they do. The standard of learners' work is good and many learners speak highly of the skills they have developed at Qube.
- Trainees develop a good understanding of their rights and begin to understand their responsibilities as an employee as they progress through the programme.
- Learners develop their mathematics and English skills very well. Qube staff provide good support enabling learners to become more confident with writing and in completing calculations.
- Learners feel, and are, safe, and are aware of what action to take if they have any concerns about possible risks to themselves or others. All learners receive training and detailed information about the risks related to radicalisation, extremism, bullying and self-harm. When learners raise concerns, managers investigate thoroughly and deal with concerns sensitively and appropriately. Learners value the particularly good pastoral and welfare support provided by Qube staff, which help overcome their barriers to learning.
- Qube managers rigorously apply health and safety procedures, conducting regular health and safety reviews in training centres and employers' premises to help ensure that learners are safe.
- All learners benefit from good impartial advice, with useful input from their employers when they first join Qube. This helps them to make purposeful, informed choices about their study and career. Learners continue to receive purposeful careers advice throughout their course, helping them recognise how their training will enhance their career prospects.
- Qube staff have high expectations for their learners, which helps them to aspire to success. Several learners in retail progressed from sales assistants to shop supervisors and managers capable of dealing with difficult behaviours from customers. Managers across Qube have worked well to develop excellent resources and support materials to help promote fundamental British values with learners and employers. This material is shared with subcontractors who use it with their own learners.

Outcomes for learners are good

- The vast majority of learners, across all levels and age groups, successfully gain their planned qualifications. Achievement rates during 2014/15 have much improved following a dip in performance in 2013/14. Current learners are making good progress and the number completing within planned timescales has much improved and is well above national rates for apprentices.
- The proportion of adult learners on pre-employment training who achieve their learning goals is well above the national rates and most gain employment in construction, agriculture or in warehousing, because of their qualification in fork-lift truck driving.
- Learners on traineeship programmes develop confidence and interpersonal skills, with most going into their desired employment and many having the confidence to progress to an apprenticeship.
- Apprentices are supported very well in achieving their functional skills qualifications in English, mathematics, and information and communication technology. Most achieve these at their first attempt; those who require a second attempt are supported very well.

- Apprentices make good progress. Many have significant barriers to learning or did not achieve well at school. Those with low levels of self-esteem and confidence are supported very well. Many progress from intermediate to advanced apprenticeships, with a small minority progressing to higher apprenticeships and to university.
- Apprentices rapidly develop new skills and knowledge, enabling employers to give them more responsibility at work. Many gain promotion on completion of their qualification, while others undertake more complex work utilising their improved confidence and skills.
- The quality of most learners' work is good and all is at least at the expected level.
- Managers have taken effective action to eliminate performance gaps between male and female learners and between learners from different age groups, and as a result, these gaps have been removed.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	6,600
Principal/CEO	Mrs Debbie Gardiner
Website address	www.qube-learning.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	7	0	70	0	32	0	4
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	221	1954	39	1844	0	192		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	53		18		71			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NTG Training ■ The Equestrian Learning Academy ■ Skills Centre Plus ■ Straight A Training ■ 1st Care Training Ltd ■ Learn Plus Us ■ Aspire to Learn ■ Associated Neighbour Training 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Martin Hughes, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Shackleton	Her Majesty's Inspector
Robert Mottram	Ofsted Inspector
Kathleen Tyler	Ofsted Inspector
Patricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the operations director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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